

I. DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF JONES LAKE STATE PARK

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Jones Lake State Park is located in Bladen County, four miles north of Elizabethtown on Highway 242. To reach the park from Wilmington, drive west on US 74/76. Turn right onto NC 87 and travel north toward Elizabethtown. Turn right onto NC 87 Business. At the second light, turn right onto US 701. Travel north for one mile and take a left onto NC 53. Take an immediate right onto NC 242 and drive north for two miles. The park entrance, indicated by a large sign, will be on the left (Figure I-1).

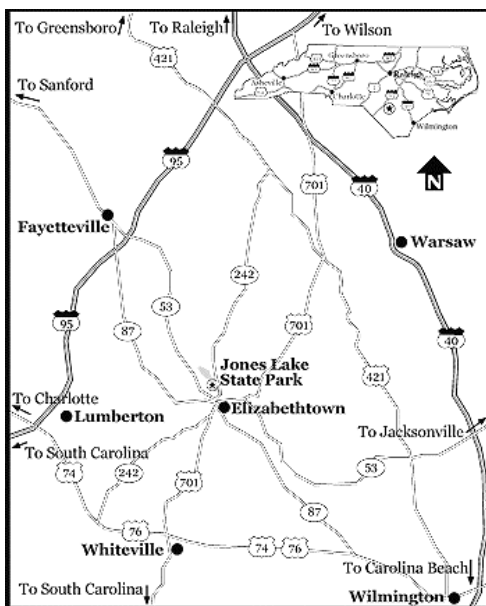


Figure I-1. Jones Lake Area Map

To arrive at Jones Lake from Fayetteville, drive east on NC 53 for approximately 40 miles. Turn left onto NC 242 and travel north for two miles. The park entrance, on the left, is marked with a large sign.

The park's mailing address, telephone numbers and email address are:

Jones Lake State Park
4117 NC 242 Hwy. North
Elizabethtown, N.C. 28337-4975

Office (910) 588-4550
Office (910) 588-4320

Jones.Lake@ncmail.net

PARK LAND

Jones Lake State Park consists of 2,208 acres that includes the 224-acre Jones Lake and nearby Salters Lake, 315 acres in size. Both of the lakes are Carolina bays, elliptical depressions found primarily in the coastal plain of the southeastern United States. Called bays because of the sweet bay, loblolly bay and red bay trees found growing in and around them, most Carolina bays are small – less than 500 feet long – and no longer contain open water. Instead, over time the lakes have filled with wet organic soils and become overgrown with pocosin vegetation.

Both Jones and Salters bays contain open water. The Jones Lake bay is approximately 8,000 feet long, and Jones Lake has a shoreline of 2.2 miles. Both lakes have a raised sand rim around their southeastern shores. The lakes are fed by precipitation, and the shallow water is highly acidic and contains few plant nutrients. Although water quality is

excellent, the water is dark colored due to decomposing plant matter, called peat, found on the lake bottom.

Jones Lake State Park has diverse natural communities with typical bay vegetation. Evergreens, including sweet bay, loblolly bay and red bay, are predominant. Because the bog around the lake, also called a pocosin, has poor drainage and is subject to flooding



and drought, the area has few herbaceous plants. Sheep laurel, blueberry and fetterbush thrive in the acidic soil. Pond pine and Atlantic white cedar are common in the bay forest. These trees usually do not reproduce in such shaded areas, but natural fires have burned the underbrush, allowing their growth. Today, prescribed burning is essential for the perpetuation of these communities. Without fire, the character of these vegetative communities would eventually change.

Figure I-2. Sunset at Jones Lake

Bladen Lakes State Forest lands surround the state park lands and are intensively managed for timber production. Most of state forest lands are also state gamelands managed for hunting by the Wildlife Resources Commission.

VISITOR FACILITIES

Jones Lake State Park recreational facilities are clustered around the 224-acre Jones Lake (Figure I-4). A shallow-water swimming area and sandy beach allow enjoyment of the cool and clean, tea-colored water. A pier provides access for swimming. For visitor convenience, a concession stand and bathhouse are located nearby. Canoes and paddleboats may be rented from Memorial Day through Labor Day at the boathouse adjacent to the pier. For visitors bringing their own watercraft, a road to the lake allows small craft with motors ten horsepower or less to be launched. Nearby hiking trails offer an opportunity to experience the habitats of a Carolina bay.



Figure I-3. Jones Lake Picnic Shelter

While few fish species are present due to the water's acidity, fishing is nonetheless popular. A fishing pier may be accessed from the lake trail, not far from the campground.

More than 50 tables and eight grills are available adjacent to the lake for picnicking. A large picnic shelter accommodates up to 150 people, while six small shelters accommodate families and small groups.

Jones Lake State Park has 20 campsites for tent and trailer camping. Each wooded site is equipped with a picnic table and grill. Drinking water and restrooms with showers are located nearby. One of the campsites has electrical and water hookups and is available for

both tents and recreational vehicles. The park, however, does not offer a dump station for recreational vehicles.

A primitive group campsite, available for organized groups of 20 people or less, is open year round. The site includes a fire circle and grill, picnic tables, benches and a pit toilet. Water is also available. The site is available by reservation only, and reservations must be made at least one week in advance.

A visitor's center was recently constructed, opening in July 2005. The center houses administrative offices and includes space for environmental education programs and exhibits for learning about the park.

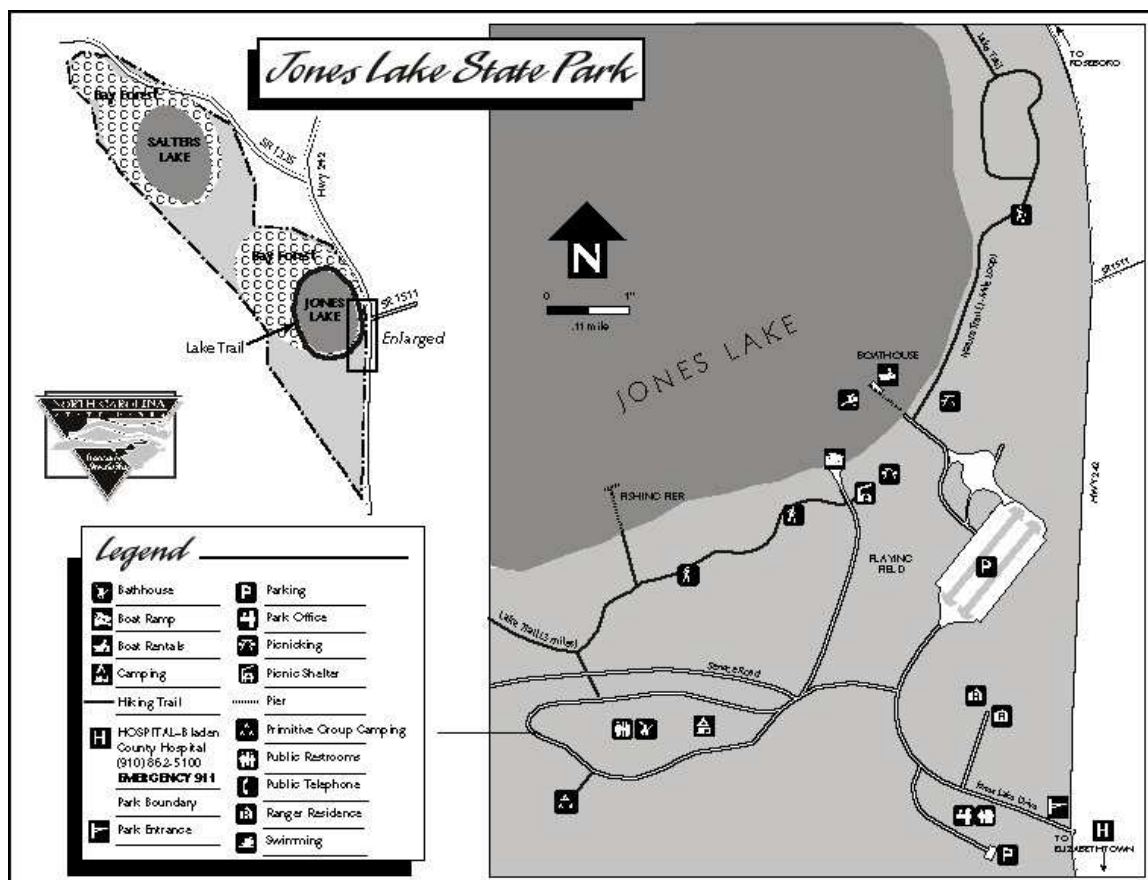


Figure I-4. Jones Lake State Park

HISTORY OF JONES LAKE

Jones Lake State Park is located in an area of sandy sediment derived from the Cape Fear River. The terrace on which the park lies is of the Upper Pleistocene age (Soller, 1988). The sediments on the surface of the land have been shaped and reshaped by wind action into a gently undulating sandy surface. Geologists, by studying pollen grains, have determined that the bays in the Bladen County area of North Carolina were formed about 40,000 years ago.

The Bladen Lakes area contains one of the largest concentrations of Carolina bays. These elliptical, southeast-northwest oriented depressions are found scattered over much of the Coastal Plain of North Carolina and South Carolina. Scientists have long wondered about the origin of the Carolina bays. Many hypotheses have been proposed, including underground springs, wind and wave action, dissolution of subsurface minerals and meteor showers. The oriented lakes theory (wind and wave action) is best supported by scientific evidence. Over many years, most of these shallow bays have filled in with sediment and vegetation (N.C. Geological Survey, 1989). Jones and Salters lakes are examples of Carolina bays that are still water filled.

The bay lakes region of Bladen County was settled during colonial times, primarily by Highland Scots who came to the Cape Fear River Valley seeking religious freedom. Bladen County, formed in 1734 from New Hanover County, was originally a huge area. Of the 100 counties now in North Carolina, 55 were once a part of Bladen County (Elizabethtown-White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce). Although it has been greatly reduced in size, Bladen County remains North Carolina's fourth largest county.

Jones Lake was known as Woodward's Lake for Samuel Woodward, a justice of the peace in 1734. The lake was probably later renamed for Isaac Jones, an adjacent landowner on whose land Elizabethtown, the county seat, was established in 1773 (Powell, 1968).

Salters Lake received its name from Sallie Salter, a Revolutionary War heroine who spied on the Tories encamped at Elizabethtown. Salter was a member of one of the most influential families in the Cape Fear River area of Bladen County. Her spying helped lead to the defeat of the Tories on August 28, 1781 at the Battle of Elizabethtown, where 70 Whigs under the command of Colonel Thomas Robeson defeated a force of 400 Tories and struck a blow for liberty (Elizabethtown-White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce).

For approximately 100 years after the area was settled, landowners practiced farming along the river lowlands and creek bottoms. Settlers in the bay lakes region generally led lives of marginal subsistence. Longleaf pines, then prolific in the area, were used for the production of naval stores, primarily providing turpentine, pitch and timber. These products were critical for building and maintaining sailing vessels of the period. As rivers were then the most effective means of transportation, naval stores and other products were rafted down the Cape Fear River to the port of Wilmington. Many longleaf pine trees in the park still carry the marks of the turpentiners who hacked the trees.

Statewide interest in the Carolina bay lakes emerged in the 1820s. During the 1827-1828 legislature, a bill was passed that made it unlawful for anyone to record for private ownership the lands covered by the waters of any lake within North Carolina. The law followed the limitation of the private recording of unappropriated marsh or swamplands that had been enacted during the previous legislature (*State Lakes Master Plan*, 1977). Some such lands and waters held by the state were then sold by the state over the years to raise funds for education.

Recognizing North Carolina's lakes as public resources belonging to the people, the General Assembly of 1911 passed legislation prohibiting private ownership of land covered by lake waters. The legislation directed that:

White Lake, Black Lake, Waccamaw Lake, and any other lake in Bladen, Columbus, or Cumberland counties containing 500 acres or more shall never be sold or conveyed to any person, firm or corporation, but shall always be and remain the property of the State of North Carolina for the use and benefit of all the people of the State. (Chapter 8, G.S. 7544)

Additional legislation passed in 1929 designated North Carolina lakes of 50 acres or more as state property never to be sold. Both the 224-acre Jones Lake and the 315-acre Salters Lake were state owned lakes at that time, so the legislation assured that both lakes would remain state lakes unless the North Carolina General Statutes were changed by subsequent legislative action.

The area's population grew along with the turpentine, lumber and cotton industries. Due to unsustainable practices of these industries, the land began to lose its capacity to support the population by providing the resources for industry. To make matters worse, the country entered the Great Depression. By 1935, with the fall of the cotton farmer and the contraction of industry, large segments of the population found themselves on submarginal land (*State Lakes Master Plan*, 1977).

Because of economic circumstances and trying times during the Great Depression, in the 1930s the federal government established various conservation programs in order to create jobs. Millions of dollars were poured into conservation. In North Carolina, the state parks system benefited greatly from federal assistance programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Jones Lake, Morrow Mountain, Hanging Rock, Cape Hatteras (now a national seashore), Singletary Lake, Pettigrew, and Umstead state parks were established and greatly benefited from these Depression era public works programs. The state's fiscal participation in the development of the state parks system prior to and during this period of time was minimal (*Eighth Biennial Report*, 1940).

The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 authorized the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to develop a program of land conservation and utilization. Under the Act and working cooperatively with state authorities, the federal government purchased approximately 35,544 acres of submarginal farmlands and other properties in the Bladen County area at an average cost of \$4.51 an acre (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Called the Bladen Lakes Land Use Area, the acquired acreage included land around Jones and Salters lakes as well as Singletary Lake. Not all local landowners wanted to sell their

property, necessitating the acquisition of 51 parcels totaling 9,376 acres via condemnation judgments (Bladen County, 1954).

The federal agency for the acquisition and development of submarginal land areas, begun in 1934, later became the Resettlement Administration, and this agency managed the Bladen Lakes Land Use area from 1936-1939. In order to stimulate the depressed local economy, a program of land conservation and associated development began (*Eighth Biennial Report*, 1940). In 1936, the National Park Service working with the state created a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in the area to provide emergency work for the depressed area (*State Lakes Master Plan*, 1977). Very little commercial timber remained on the acquired lands so reforestation was undertaken and some roads constructed. From the beginning of the project, it was generally expected that these lands would be eventually turned over to the state to be administered as state forests (*Seventh Biennial Report*, 1938). Using Civilian Conservation Corps laborers and local residents (Claridge, 1958) and materials, the Resettlement Administration oversaw construction of a large bathhouse, beach and swim area, boathouse with rental boats, refreshment stand and picnic grounds.

The 1937 General Assembly passed Chapter 228, an act to empower the Department of Conservation and Development to acquire by purchase or by the power of eminent domain lands within two miles of Jones and Singletary lakes. The Resettlement Administration requested the measure so that areas that the federal government had been unable to acquire through private purchase could be acquired. The Resettlement Administration as then organized was unable to condemn the land. Acquisition of certain areas was essential to establish the swimming beach at Jones Lake. The bill appropriated \$10,000 for such purposes. Shortly thereafter, the federal government purchased the tracts that the state acquired via condemnation, reimbursing the state for much of the land costs, and the land became part of the Jones and Salters Lakes Project (*Seventh Biennial Report*, 1938).



Figure I-5. Visitors at the Concession Stand

In January 1937, the Resettlement Administration became a bureau of the Department of Agriculture. After other reorganizations, the Land Utilization Division was transferred in October 1938 to the Soil Conservation Service, headquartered in Atlanta. It was through this bureau of the Department of Agriculture that the transfer of responsibility to the state for the administration of the Bladen Lakes Land Use Area was made in 1939 (*Eighth Biennial Report*, 1940).



Figure I-6. Jones Lake about 1942

The state leased the federal lands and established Jones Lake State Park, the first state park for Negroes. Both Jones and Salters lakes were included in the park. The park opened to the public July 1, 1939, and “...achieved an immediate popularity which clearly demonstrated the need for outdoor recreational facilities for Negroes.” Users came from distant places such as Greensboro and Winston-Salem as well as eastern North Carolina, arriving in “...private cars, taxis, trucks, and trailers equipped with



Figure I-7. Arrival at Jones Lake

church pews. Groups of several hundred were common.” Approximately 22,000 visitors came between the park’s opening and September 17 when seasonal operations ended. Paid admissions to the bathhouse numbered 4370, and many visitors that did not pay to use the bathhouse used the lake and beach. Boats were rented a total of 710 hours, and picnicking was also a popular activity. The concession was heavily used. The Department of Conservation and Development attributed part of the success of the first season to the “...policy of employing Negro personnel” (*Eighth Biennial Report*, 1940).

The Division of Forestry of the Department of Conservation and Development assumed responsibility for the leased property, in accordance with the terms of the lease agreement and with the state law providing for its acceptance (Chapter 226, Public Laws of 1935). The lease required the state to use the leased property for forestry, wildlife and recreational purposes and to operate, maintain, and administer the existing and any future recreational facilities for the use and benefit of the general public (*Eighth Biennial Report*, 1940). Another state park unit, Singletary Lake Group Camp, also opened in the summer of 1939, and the first state forest was created; both were established using Bladen Lakes Land Use Area lands, and both benefited from work undertaken by the Civilian Conservation Corps.



Figure I-8. Pier and Swimming Beach

Jones Lake Recreational Area continued to be popular, with summer attendance increasing from 25,000 in 1940 to 38,000 in 1941 even though no additional facilities were constructed. With the advent of World War II, the federal public works programs and their construction and development activities in the state parks system stopped almost entirely. Gas and tire rationing during the war limited the ability of people to travel, so state park visitation dropped significantly. Trained personnel were lost to military service and some operations were curtailed, although all of the state parks and recreational areas were kept open (*Ninth Biennial Report*, 1942).

During World War II, Jones Lake was kept open for picnicking and fishing, with special permit camping by the Boy Scouts. Recreation programs for Negro soldiers were arranged, and the Anti-Aircraft School from Camp Davis also used the area for special training programs both day and night (*Tenth Biennial Report*, 1944). Because of the war and the polio epidemic in the summer of 1944, visitation dropped across the state parks system and activities were reduced. Once gasoline rationing was lifted in August 1945, a sharp increase in use and attendance at state parks – including Jones Lake - resulted (*Eleventh Biennial Report*, 1946).

Most of the land area at Jones Lake State Park consisted of bog-bay and swamp forest, so from the start development potential at the park has been very limited. The park's high ground occurs on the sand rim surrounding Jones Lake and the rolling sand dunes on the east side of Salters Lake. Recreational facilities at Jones Lake proved inadequate to meet public demand. No facilities were provided for camping, and the temporary picnic facilities were insufficient. To address these needs, \$30,000 was allotted to Jones Lake from the 1947 appropriation to make repairs and improvements to the recreational facilities (*Twelfth Biennial Report*, 1948). In 1948 several facilities were constructed with funds from the appropriation: a large picnic shelter with a fireplace at each end; a

2037 square foot boathouse used to house rental boats; a campground washhouse; a shop/maintenance building; and an 1803 square foot park office and barracks building. All the facilities constructed in 1948 were still in use in 2005.



Figure I-9. Fun at the Swimming Beach

The Division of State Parks was established in 1948 and assumed responsibility for management of Jones Lake State Park. In October 1954, the leased park land was given to the state by the federal government. The deed requires that the land be used for public purposes, and, if at any time the land ceases to be used for such purposes, ownership would revert to the United States.

By the early 1960s, the original frame bathhouse constructed in the late 1930s badly needed replacing, and the General Assembly of 1963 appropriated funds for that purpose. In 1965, Jones Lake received a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) matching grant of almost \$23,000 to demolish the old bathhouse and construct a new one, roads and parking (U.S. Department of the Interior). After 36 years of service to Jones Lake visitors, the second bathhouse was demolished in 2003. By virtue of receiving LWCF assistance, the park is subject to LWCF regulations that require, among other things, that the park be retained and used for public outdoor recreation.

After civil rights advances, the park – as well as all other North Carolina state parks - became fully integrated in 1966. In 1969, a new concession stand was added to the park for the convenience of park visitors. The facility - conveniently located to the bathhouse, lakeside picnic area and the pier - consisted of an enclosed storage area, a covered deck for the public, and a raised public terrace (Ballard, McKim and Sawyer, 1969). The 1969 concession building has also been demolished.

In 2004 construction began on a park visitor's center, concession and bathhouse facility,



Figure I-10. Jones Lake Visitor's Center

and renovation of the 1948 boathouse. The visitor's center includes an auditorium, exhibits focusing on the park's history and natural resources, classroom space for interpretation and environmental education, and administrative offices. The visitor's center, concession and bathhouse, and renovated boathouse opened in July 2005.

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